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ABSTRACT

An adult basic education (ABE) class was developed to help parolees of the Schuylkill County Prison develop reading, writing, and communication skills and use those skills in a community service project aimed at helping at-risk youth. Parolees were recruited into the project through county parole officers, and their reading, writing, self-esteem, and oral communication skills were assessed. The parolees attended classes in reading, writing, and oral communication, and they applied their new skills by writing newsletters and speaking to selected classes of at-risk youth. During the project, the parolees averaged gains of 1.8 grade levels in reading and 50% on their writing samples but did not exhibit any significant gains in oral communication skills. Those parolees participating in the project manifested significant effort and enthusiasm in their attempts to keep at-risk youth from making the same mistakes they made. Project monitoring and teacher/counselor feedback established that the project objectives had been developed for higher-functioning adult basic education students. Although the county parole board supported the project, it was powerless to recruit those higher-functioning adults likely to have benefited most from the course. (Appended are recruitment flyers and the class newsletter.) (MN)

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# Good Citizens Through Literacy Network

## A 353 Project Final Report

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# Good Citizens Through Literacy Network

## A 353 Project Final Report

Submitted by: Lyn Leto
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The Schuylkill Intermediate Unit #29

Fiscal Year: 1993 - 1994

Grantee: The Schuylkill Intermediate Unit #29
P.O. Box 130, Maple Avenue
Mar Lin, PA 17951-0130

Federal Grant: $10,183.00
Project Number: 98-4047

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## ABSTRACT PAGE


| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Title:** | Good Citizens Through Literacy Network | | |
| **Project No.** | 98-4047 | **Funding:** | $10,183 |
| **Project Director:** | Lyn Leto | **Phone #:** | (717) 544-9131 |
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**PURPOSE:** This project consisted of an ABE class for parolees of The Schuylkill County Prison to develop their skills in reading, writing and communication skills. The course employed the motivational technique of enabling the parolees to participate in a community service aimed at helping "at-risk" youth. Parolees were asked to develop their literacy and communication skills and then to practice using them in producing a newsletter for county youth and in doing speaking engagements in selected classrooms.

**PROCEDURES:** Parolees were recruited into the project through county parole officers. Pre and post testing in the areas of reading, writing, self-esteem, and oral communication skills was done to assess project effectiveness. Classes involved teaching reading, writing, and oral communication skills. Varied activities offering practice in these areas were a significant component of the program. Students then applied these skills in the writing of newsletters and in doing public speaking to selected classes of "at-risk" youth.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:** The average reading gain was 1.8. The average gain on writing samples was 50%. No significant gain was made in oral communication skills. Project participants evidenced significant effort and enthusiasm in helping at-risk youth from making the same mistakes that they did.

**COMMENTS:** Project monitoring and teacher/counselor feedback proved that the project objectives were developed with a higher-functioning ABE student in mind. The County Parole Board, although supportive of the project, proved powerless in assuring recruitment of higher functioning adults likely to have benefited most from the course. It is suggested that a judicial order mandating parolees' participation be obtained before implementing courses geared to the parolee population.

**PRODUCTS:** Student newsletter

**INTRODUCTION:**

The Schuylkill Intermediate Unit seeks to address the problem of illiteracy within the corrections industry in Schuylkill County through its ABE Prison Program. Utilizing this avenue, hundreds of offenders have availed themselves of the opportunity to improve their basic skills and even to earn their GED's. However, an examination of county parole records reveals a recidivism rate of 10%, which clearly parallels that of the state of Pennsylvania. Therefore, we hypothesize that although Schuylkill County incarcerated adults are privy to adult basic education services while in prison, and although test scores indicate the program's success, the program's achievements are, in fact, vitiated through the lack of appropriate literacy support upon parole.

Since the ultimate goal of literacy services is to produce productive citizens, we cannot call our corrections ABE program, as it presently exists, successful long-term via our achievement scores alone. If 10% of Schuylkill County offenders continue in their anti-social lifestyles and return to prison as a result of their chronic malfeasance, then we must find the missing link between basic skills levels instruction and compliance with societal norms. When 40% of parolees fail to maintain gainful employment within nine months after parole, then we who are dedicated to adult education must continue an active crusade to find that missing link. Therefore, The Good Citizens Through Literacy Network was formulated on the hypothesis that there is a significant correlation between education and a lifestyle lived within societal parameters.

We hypothesized that parolees, who did not earn a high school diploma or GED's who participated in a past prison ABE course, would receive educational and related social benefits. Therefore, an ABE course would be implemented providing instruction and "hands on" opportunities for application of newly-acquired skills.

The report that follows will be available through the following organizations:
The Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education Programs
The Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

ADVANCE
PDE Resource Center
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

The Western Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Resource Center
5347 Route 8
Gibsonia, PA 15044

**BODY OF THE REPORT**

The Good Citizens Through Literacy Network was designed to develop the ABE skills of reading and writing in conjunction with a program to develop oral communication skills. The rationale was to use the opportunities afforded by the relative freedom of parolee status to apply new literacy and communication skills to community service. Hands-on practice would provide a relevance in learning not possible for adults living in correctional facilities. This project sought to link knowledge with positive attitudinal and behavioral change through an expanded ABE course tailored in content, technique, and activities to the specific needs of a newly-paroled populace.

Students had the opportunity to learn reading, along with writing and oral communication skills. Prisoners, subject to the vagaries of sentence length and arbitrary prison transfers, frequently are short-changed by time constraints. The additional class hours, combined with the relative freedom of parole versus incarceration, enables the students to engage in meaningful class activities and projects. Former prisoners had the opportunities of planned and supervised "hands-on" applications of knowledge learned. They had the luxury of increased time for knowledge and attitudinal adjustment to coalesce.

The curriculum incorporated the results of three research studies presently available through ADVANCE. "Teaching the Hard to Reach" and "Working with Releasees". The Schuylkill Intermediate Unit's 353 Project of last year, "A Writing Communications Curriculum for Incarcerated Adults", developed by the present Director of this project, served as a benchmark in the development in this curriculum. Based on the results of last year's 353 Project, this ABE course used the motivation of altruism, specifically, the opportunity of using personal experiences in a community service to help county at-risk youth, as the motivating factor for the development of improved basic skills. The former project results indicated that this is an avenue worthy of increased scrutiny in motivating people enmeshed in anti-social behavior.

This curriculum provided the motivation for ex-offenders to improve their reading, writing, and communication skills. Students had the opportunity to benefit from the increased class time due to their parolee status, no longer subject to prison transfers and sentence length. Students, as a result of freedom vs incarceration, had the chance to become involved in community activities providing meaningful practice in their newly-acquired skills.

**PROGRAM OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will increase their reading level by at least two grade levels as measured by the TABE.

2. Students will show an increase of 30% in their writing skills as measured by pre and post writing samples.

3. Students will demonstrate an improvement in oral communication skills as measured on an oral communication evaluation scale.

**PROGRAM RESULTS:**

1. The average student reading level increased by 1.8.
2. The average student writing sample increased by 50%.
3. No noticeable change was evidenced in students' oral communication skills.

**PROCEDURES:**

The project supervisor conducted a series of meetings with the parole officers of Schuylkill County. At these meetings the rationale and the goals of the program were explained. As a result, the parole officers took an active role in the recruitment of parolees for the course.

Parole officers provided the program supervisor with a list of 75 adults currently on parole status. Using this list, the program supervisor sent letters to each paroleee which explained the program concept, enumerated the potential benefits, and solicited participation. Each letter was followed by a telephone contact. In addition, recruitment flyers were given to parolees by their parole officers.

The project supervisor was fortunate to have procured a most favorable site for the proposed classes. "The Roundhouse" is an administrative building for a low-income housing development located in the neighborhood of the Schuylkill County prison as well as the Schuylkill County Courthouse, the site of parole meetings. Therefore, the Roundhouse was readily accessible, as well as a "comfortable" site, to the target audience.

After pre-testing, students participated in an ABE curriculum integrating reading, writing, and oral communication skills. The class members were fully apprised of their mission to share their life experiences with at-risk youth in order to help others from making the same mistakes as they did. Students readily took up the cause of community service and worked towards their goals of producing a newsletter and preparing talks to be given to their target audience.

With a strong motivating factor, student parolees actively participated in classes consisting of trade materials in conjunction with current event news sources dealing with social/crime issues. These class readings and home assignments were then used as springboards for writing lessons. The class was always cognizant of the reason for this curriculum and worked enthusiastically to bring the class goals to fruition.

In addition, students read, as a group, an abridged low-level edition of Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment and Conrad's Heart of Darkness, providing them with a literary perspective on the class themes of good and evil, choice and responsibility. Related writing and speaking exercises were incorporated into this literature component.

Counseling was an integral part of this project. Students were afforded the opportunity to travel to The Lifelong Learning Center where they were able to take part in computerized career exploration. The counselor used this base information to conduct group and individualized counseling session focusing on successful job seeking and keeping, focusing on special needs of the parolee population. The counselor served as a link between students and job providers. The counselor also conducted workshops on the importance of communication skills in the workplace.

A partnership between this project and a local alternative school for at-risk youth was formed. Through this partnership, the Good Citizen class was able to visit selected classes to make their oral presentations and to hold open forums with the youth. This practice provided the parolees with relevant practice and also served to keep morale high. The adult students remained highly motivated, as a result of these class visits, to present their experiences, both written and oral, to the very best of their ability.

While students in the program increased their reading and writing skills significantly, their oral skills did not show significant growth. The project staff believes that this is a result of the very low ability levels of this ABE group. This group had an average pre-course reading level of 4.2. Therefore, it is not surprising that this group of students were noticeably inarticulate. And, since oral communication requires a higher level of self-monitoring, the students' efforts in this area remained problematic throughout the program.

The students' low achievement levels also made production of the newsletter extremely difficult. Whereas the goal was to produce four newsletters, the students in this class were only to produce one. However, their determination and their level of work are evident in a fine piece of work that belies the incoming ability levels of the group.

# IF IT IS TO BE.....IT'S UP TO ME!

Remember when you promised yourself that things would be different when you "got out"? Start now and keep that promise to yourself by making a positive change in your life and in the life of others too.

—

- **Be part of a group of county parolees who will publish a newspaper of their thoughts, feelings, and opinions.**

- **Be part of a group of county parolees who will make a video concerning personal opinions about drug/alcohol abuse, violence, education, and teen sex.**

- **Have a chance to visit selected classes in the county for "open forums" with "at-risk" teens.**

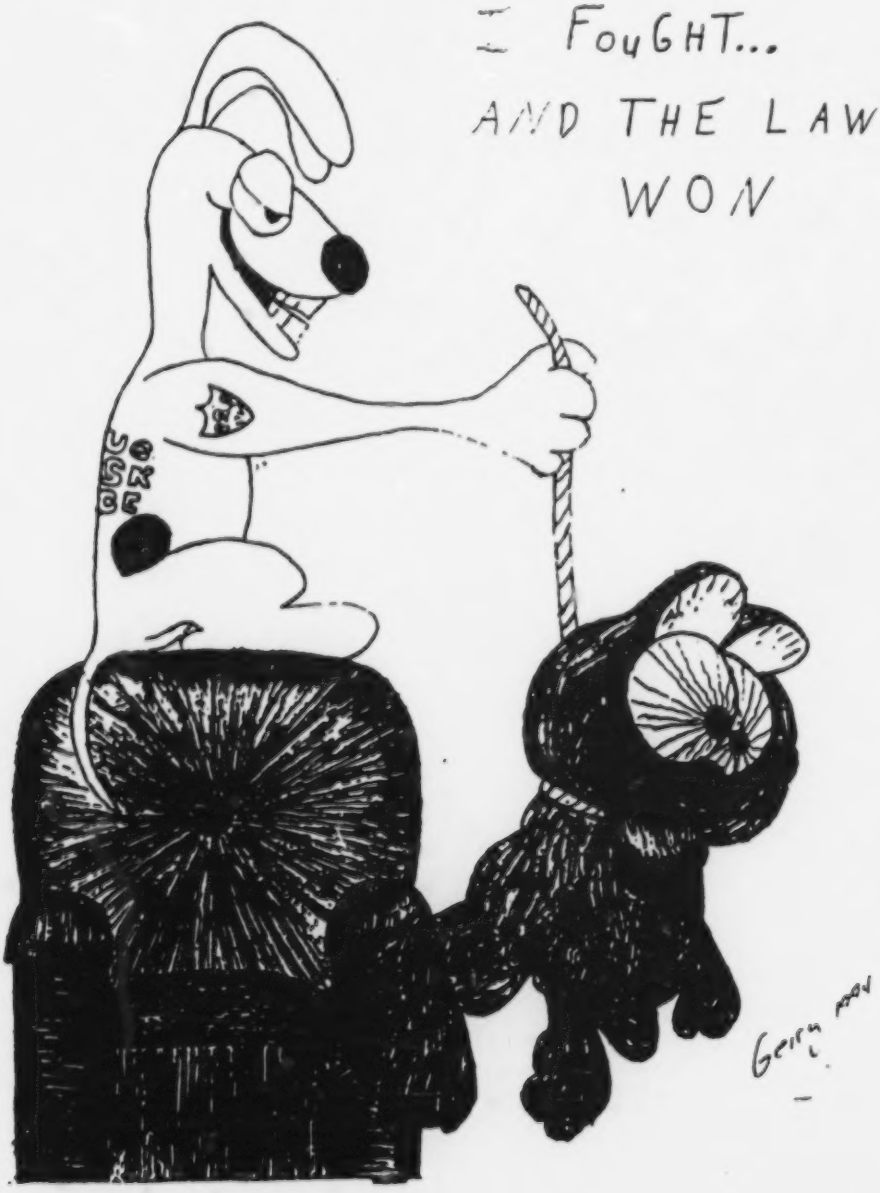
Through these activities, you will gain experiences in communications that may help you in your job search, and, at the same time, make a positive contribution to the community.

If any or all of the opportunities listed above appeal to you, call Lyn Leto at 544-9131 during the day, or simply "Come on Over" to

**The Roundhouse**
**410 Laurel Boulevard**
**Pottsville, PA 17901**

**Tuesdays, 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

DOIN TIME
NEWS FROM YOUR LOCAL EX-CONS
VOL. 1 JUNE 1990 EDITION 1




## THE 6X9 CELL

In a 6 X 9 cell
is where I'm spending Time
cause I thought I was cool
to commit a foolish Crime.

Each and every day,
I dream of the Past
and only hope
that a memory would Last.

For life is short
in this place called Hell.
Where I spend most
of my life in a Cell.

A joy ride it was
to live without Fear.
But now all I do
is wipe away Tears.

It hurts deep inside
to be behind a Wall,
to listen to voices
who never answer your Call.

For on a form
your name makes a List
and to the world
you no longer Exist.

You're a nobody
in a pit of Hell.
For to commit a crime
you'll spend it in a 6 X 9 Cell.

Jon Barry
# 12375

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The day started out like any other day. Friends stopped by my place and knowing I had stolen before, asked me to join them in the robbery of homes in Pottsville. Because I never hit houses before, I said no and went back to sleep. Later, they returned with goods they had stolen; money, jewelry, guns, etc. and my mind started to run wild with greed. So, trying to rationalize, I said "One time and done!"

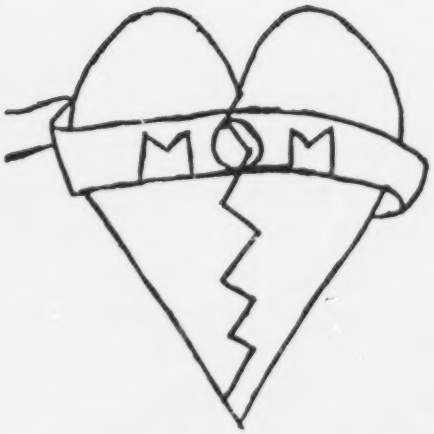
So, we proceeded to walk and found a house and began to go crazy grabbing everything in sight. I had NO guilt. We hid the goods in the woods and went for another house. We got a big surprise when someone was there screaming. We ran, but later got nabbed by the cops, with fire arms.

Then, I came to jail, of course wishing that I'd never gone with my so-called friends. Then I learned the best lesson of my life. My cell was searched and ripped apart. When I returned to my cell, I looked at what the guards had done to my personal stuff. It hit me!! I was mad and then I began to realize how those people felt when they returned home and their houses were robbed. For the first time I felt real sorry for what I did to them. They never deserved that to happen to them.

Just remember - it's never too late to go straight! "Friends don't make friends do anything they don't want to do."

Bill H.

## MOM'S BROKEN HEART




**I broke my mother's heart the day I called her on the phone and told her I was going to prison for 18-48 months. She just broke down in tears and wasn't even able to speak. I told her that I loved her no matter how much I'm away from her. She cried even more.**

**I'm now in prison and I see her on visiting day. I know her heart is still broken because I can see tears in her eyes. I tell her now and then one day your heart won't be broke and that will be when I get out of here.**

**She says to me, "Daughter, my heart will be broke to think of what your going through and what you went through because I wasn't there for you when you needed me."**

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**J.M.J.**

## ONLY A DREAM

Hurray! The guard just told me to pack up. they said that I can go home! Incredible. My time can't be up yet - I thought I had eight months left to go. You either pack up now or you'll never, ever get out of this place.

O.K., O.K. I'm going, but where did my full 18 month go? Don't ask questions. Pack up and let's go. My mind goes crazy trying to figure out what's happening to me - this can't possibly be true.

NO

This isn't True. Finally I open my eyes and begin to realize that it was only a dream. I'm still here in this lonely cell just getting the call for supper - talk about disappointment. I guess that's why there only called dreams.

Josette Jullian

## PEER PRESSURE

I always looked up to my big brother. He seemed to be able to get away with things. He drank a lot and stole stuff from family and friends. Somehow, the way he acted seemed cool to me. Then, I wanted to be just like him.

I learned early on how to follow the crowd. I even got busted when I was in the third grade. Somehow getting busted doesn't feel so cool in fact, feeling "stupid," is more how I felt.

I'm almost 26 years old and I keep on trying to make up those early mistakes. I'm pulling myself up but it's not easy. If I could get back the last eight years I'd find myself a different hero.

Kelly Dieter

SOME KIDS BRAG THAT THEY'LL GET LOCKED UP SOME DAY.

## But

Being locked up makes you feel:

Trapped

Lonely

Not wanted

Scared

Desperate

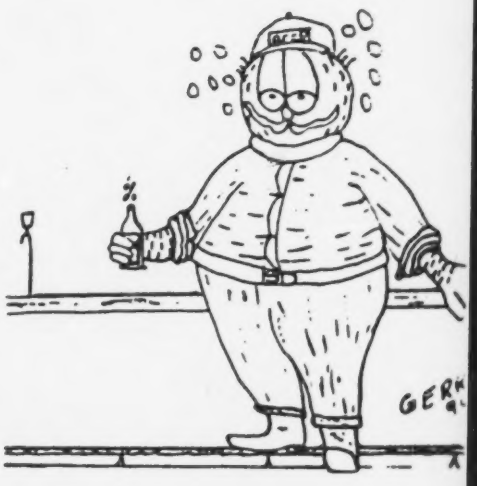
Stupid.

Take it from me. It's not cool at all. If I could do it over I would not play with crime.

Diane Snyder

### Test your Booze -Q

1. The alcohol content in one 12-ounce can of beer is equal to:
   a. One shot (1.5 ounces) of liquor
   b. One 4-ounce glass of wine
   c. One 12-ounce wine cooler
   d. All of the above
2. Which one of the following helps a drinker sober up?
   a. Time b. Coffee c. Exercise
3. Alcohol is a drug that can:
   a. Alter behavior b. Become habit-forming
   c. Both a and b
4. Which of the following statements is most accurate about food and alcohol?
   a. Food prevents absorption of alcohol
   b. Food slows the absorption of alcohol
   c. Food has no effect on the absorption of alcohol
5. For young people, alcohol is a factor in:
   a. 20% highway deaths b. 40% highway deaths
   c. 60% highway deaths
6. In Pennsylvania, adults who purchase alcohol for a minor can:
   a. Pay a $5000 fine and avoid a jail sentence
   b. Pay a $1000 fine and go to jail for a year
   c. Attend alcohol education classes and pay a $500 fine
7. It takes how long for the human body to absorb and metabolize one drink?
   a. One-half hour b. One hour c. Two hours
8. The amount of time it takes alcohol to leave the body:
   a. Can be increased b. Can be decreased
   c. Cannot be changed
9. The first driving ability affected by alcohol is:
   a. Coordination b. Vision c. Judgment





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# FORMER O.P. STUDENTS

As a Former O.P. Student, I can actually say "I've been in your shoes." I came to O.P. because I couldn't deal with public school. I got into lots of trouble, and I never cared about anything except having fun. It's only fun until the time comes to pay the consequences.

A lot of kids your age idolized me. Maybe you remember me as Teardrop, Tot, or Jon. They thought cause I acted crazy - I was cool. Don't accept someone for how they act. Look for who they are. It's what's inside that counts.

Three of my friends follow me and ended up on Probation. I was always a good leader or should I say "Bad."

Life is too short to waste away in placements or jail. You can loose the most important time of your life.

In jail all you do is listen to people tell you what to do. If you think listening to your parents lecturing was bad, just wait for guards orders. They tell you when to eat, sleep or go for exercise.

Life is one constant riddle that has to be answered every day of your life, and if you answer it wrong, you'll have to resay the whole riddle till you finally answer it right.

Jon Barry

# 12375

We were 18 when we met, married a few years later. I had hoped that my marriage would last a lifetime and I would do "anything" I could to ensure what it worked. I would love and support him. What I didn't know at the time was that our lives would be filled with abuse, physical and substance. That the "anything" I had promised meant us; steal from and manipulate the people I love - my family; my friends.

Although, I knew that eventually there might be a high price to pay for this love, if not a lifetime of disapproval and difficulties as a result of my addictive love and behavior. I suppressed the thought through alcohol. The only thing that mattered was to not lose him or his so-called love.

I ended up behind locked doors, feeling almost claustrophobic and wanting to put great distance between myself and the county jail cell. Instead I spent my time, doing time hoping to bring a semblance of order to the chaos that ruled my head and my heart.

As years passed all attempts of proving my loyalty through lying; my devotion through deceit have cost me not only my freedom, but my children, my family and now my husband. Love? Maybe. Sick? Definitely. Worth it? Not even close! You see as I finished out my time he took off with another woman.



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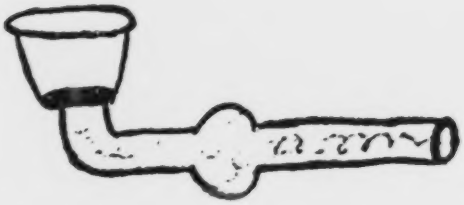
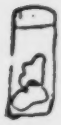




To Whom It May Concern,

I won't waste my time by "sugar coating" this. In my opinion it would serve no purpose, so I'll tell you straight up. If you want any of the following things out of life, then experiment with drugs. 1) Jail. 2) Mental institution. 3) Death. It's plain and simple. I've been a user since age 12. I am now nearly 39. Everyone that I know, or ever did know for that matter has met one of the three above mentioned fates. If you are lucky you end up in jail, with another shot at making it on the outside. As for myself, I'm one of the lucky ones who ended in jail, and served a 15-30 month stretch. I didn't see my family for 14 months.

My family stuck with me, but were tired of coming to the place to see me through a glass cubical, and to talk to me over the phone.

How many of you have ever considered playing Russian Roulette? I don't believe that many of you have. When you think of it, everytime you get high, you can never really be sure if this is the one that puts you over your limit. Trust me when I say this, no one knows what their limit is! I've been doing drugs for more years then you've been alive, and I have overdosed many times. Drug addiction is nothing more than a slow killing disease. I thought I had a handle on things until one day I went into convulsions after smoking a half gram rock of crack, waking up and asking if I wasted any of the rock! and is it my turn yet?

I've been clean now for over a year. I still wake in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, sick to my stomach, with the taste of coke in my mouth. I hope that in time, I will not experience this side affect of my crack usage.

My point is this, crack, like all drugs, are serious killers! You never know when the next "kooker" will be your last!

I'll close now as my space is limited. I wish I had more room to relate more of my experiences, maybe one of them could convince you to stay away from drugs. Just take the word of someone who knows, play with dope, and as sure as you need your next breath, one day it will not be there!!!

Signed

Cap'n Crack
S.C.P. 10444

## IT STARTED FOR ME A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO . . .

First, you start off with a small bag here and a bag there. The money looks good and easy.

Then, you start to become greedy you become addicted, wanting more money and better highs. You feel on top of the world. No one or nothing can touch you.

Until one morning at 6:00 a.m. all of a sudden your front door gets busted in, and your house is surrounded by three cops and the drug task force. You're in a state of shock when they haul you away. It really doesn't sink in ...

Until they lock the door of your 4 X 4 room. Then you realize the only thing you have is a hope and a prayer. That one day soon you'll get out of this pit of hell.

THE DRUG LORD

Alright, just be cool, I thought. This cop can't do anything to me. "Can I see some ID sir?" "Sure." I said, with an invincible smirk. "Is there some kind of problem?" Turn around and face the car," he said, "we have a warrant for your arrest." A clickity click went the cuffs, shooting pain straight to my head mixing with the LSD I had taken four hours ago. I suddenly began to think about my girl and family. They'll all think I'm a no-good for nothing criminal. What am I going to tell them? Nothing! that's what. These cops don't have anything on me and this idiot pig never read me my rights. Suckers, I'll be out tomorrow.

Tomorrow is now August 22, 1994. I was arrested that night, September 13, 1991 for 17 burglaries. The world I knew was shattered and glued back together with stone, steel, hatred and anger. Still wet these things stuck to me everyday. Unable to trust, love, or care for anyone these emotions sit in my stomach and ferment to vinegar. Everyday I try to hold on to the good I knew, but everyday the good is lost just a little more. The only escape from the untrusting shifty eyes around me are dreams of what was and what can be. The future is always uncertain but the past always hurts me. I lost a girl, an apartment, a car, trust, friends, sunshine and of course freedom. These are all things you may have or want to have. Most of you probably use drugs and think your invincible. Wake up before you wake up next to a 200 lb. guy named Bubba who thinks you smell good or before you end up dead. Ya I know, you can lie and con your way out of anything and sure drugs aren't a problem for you, you can quit any time. Well you just keep thinking that way.

See ya soon,

Jaison

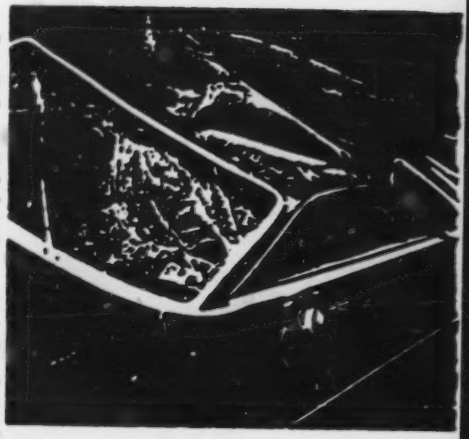
## PROBLEMS WITH DRINKING & DRIVING

Everybody thinks drinking & driving is fun. It's not! Take it from me. I learned the hard way that it gets very expensive. Drinking & driving almost cost me my life, and cost me a new car.

It was a Friday, I was having a bad day, and the evening was even worse. I was in a big fight with my girlfriend, and thought that parting was the answer. I got three other friends together and got some beer for the night. I thought I was cool, being able to get beer any time, even though I was under age. Getting alcohol gained me some popularity, but then it almost cost me my life in the end.

It was about 6:00 o'clock and I picked up my friends and started cruisin'. We left Auburn and started to drink and driving around the back roads, until I said "hey let's go to Kempton" and everyone agreed. So we were cruisin' around down there for about two hours or more drinking the beer, having fun, and joking around about crashing my car. We were getting really drunk and came up with an idea. My friend said "hey let's go back to town and get my car out" so we agreed.

It was about 10:00 o'clock and we got back into town and he got his car out. I thought we were out of beer, so I went home and got out my bottle of Jack Daniels. I was drinking the Jack Daniels like it was water. I later met up with my friends again down town and we said "let's play follow the leader" and we agreed. We went out on another back road and started to play. We were driving at ridiculous speeds, and to be truthful I was too drunk to even be driving then anyways. I thought it was cool to drive drunk until about a half hour later I wrecked my car. I was very lucky to get out of my car alive and in the condition I was. My car was on its roof, and inches above the door. I got into a lot of trouble, not only with the cops, also with my family. In the end it was very uncool to be out drinking & driving. If you want to be stupid like I was or even kill yourself and hurt your family then do the dumb things like I did. Take it from me, it is very uncool and even very stupid to drink and drive. Look at this picture below and ask yourself if you would like to have been in this car.



Kris Bachman



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